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Secret agents are just too secret, Rewald finds

By Walter Wright
Advertiser Staff Writer

Ronald Rewald ran into a Catch-007 this week when he tried to get permission to discuss CIA secrets with CIA agents.

The government said Rewald shouldn't tell secrets to anyone who is not a CIA agent, but the government won't say who is.

Robert Smith, attorney for Rewald, asked federal District Judge Martin Pence for permission to discuss with CIA agents Rewald's allegations that the CIA set up, operated and then abandoned his company, Bishop Baldwin Rewald Dillingham & Wong.

Pence indicated that Rewald might have an arguable basis for his request. "Hasn't he argued that the CIA cajoled, persuaded — let's say secured his services to open up the company and use the name?"

But Assistant U.S. Attorney John Peyton objected that Smith should be specific. "The government is entitled to know who it is that will be talked to," Peyton said.

"Can it be presumed that the government would not know if Rewald talked to an agent?" Pence demanded.

That wasn't the problem, Peyton said. Rewald, who claims to be a CIA agent despite government denials, "is seeking authorization to disclose national security information to people *he* designates as CIA agents," Peyton said.

That was true, Smith conceded. "They (the CIA) won't admit their first names. How do I know, if (people) say, 'I was told to do this by the agency,' and the agency denies that?" Smith asked.

Peyton said the government couldn't let Rewald decide who he is going to tell state secrets to. That could result in disclosure of national security information by Rewald to persons not cleared to receive it, Peyton said.

He conceded that "some" information held by Rewald would endanger national security if it were revealed.

Pence then suggested that Smith provide a list of purported agents to Peyton in advance, and that Peyton could indicate which were not CIA personnel. That won't work, Smith complained, because Peyton would just "say there's not an agent here" on the list.

Peyton put it another way.

"The mere identification of individuals as CIA agents is a matter of great sensitivity," Peyton said. There would "undoubtedly" be situations "in which the government wouldn't want to disclose the identity of CIA agents" to Rewald.

"We would find it highly objectionable for them to come in with a long list of individuals" and ask the government who was and was not a CIA agent.

Smith gave up. Getting anything less than blanket clearance to talk to purported agents "will cause me more problems than I need to have," he said.

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